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Vol. I

## DOOMED



BY  
Jas. D. Montague



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# DOOMED;

OR,

## THE SECRET LEAGUE OF BOSTON.

By JAS. D. MONTAGUE,

Author of "The Convict's Oath," "Billy Badger," "Missouri Jack, and His Band of 7," "Noiseless Nat," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### WARNINGS OF DOOM.

A TRAIN had just arrived at the Fitchburg depot in the city of Boston.

The passengers were pouring through the stone archways of the castellated building, some hurrying one way, some another, and all evidently in a hurry.

The time was about half-past seven in the evening, and, as many in the hurrying throng were suburban residents going to the theaters, and having little time to spare, their haste was readily understood.

As one of the new arrivals was hurrying up Haverhill street, he passed a man who suddenly turned and said, quickly:

"Doomed! X. Y. Z!"

Then he was lost in the throng, and the person whom he had thus strangely accosted saw no more of him.

He continued on his way, and had scarcely reached the station of the Boston and Maine Railroad when he encountered another tide of humanity just being landed from an incoming train.

Suddenly some one brushed against him, and in his ear these words were whispered:

"Doomed! X. Y. Z!"

As before, he did not see the person who addressed him, although he turned quickly so as to catch the features of the man, whom he knew to be another than the first.

Turning into Sudbury street, he was still hastening on, when, although he was expecting such an occurrence, and was on the lookout for the man, he was again addressed in the same manner as before, and for a third time failed to discover the speaker.

In front of the Boston Museum, where there was a perfect blaze of light, a man suddenly stepped directly in front of him and hissed:

"Doomed! Beware of the vengeance of the Secret League!"

This time he was sure that he would recognize his ac-

coster, and springing forward he aimed a blow at the fellow's face.

At the instant the air was filled with a fine powder which blinded him and caused him to gasp for breath, so pungent was the odor it gave out.

When he recovered, the man had disappeared.

"Curse them!" he muttered to himself. "I will outwit them all yet, despite the doom that they have pronounced upon me."

Striking across the Common a few minutes later, he was once more accosted, this time by a man all swathed in black and wearing a dark slouched hat drawn over his face.

"X. Y. Z., you are doomed! The Secret League will wreak a fearful vengeance upon you. Beware! You know not when the blow may fall!"

With a cry of rage, the persecuted man whipped out a revolver and fired upon the instant.

Crack!

The report rang out clear and sharp, sounding strangely loud in that lonely place.

The man in black staggered for an instant, but then regained his upright position, gave utterance to a harsh laugh.

Hurrying footsteps were heard, for the watchful guardians of the night had seen the flash and heard the report, and were now hastening to the place.

Both men fled, but as the first hurried away, he heard hissed in his ear from more than one point, the ominous words:

"Doomed! Beware of the vengeance of the Secret League!"

When the police arrived at the spot whence the shot had proceeded nothing was to be seen.

The hunted man had reached his house, and was about ascending the steps, when a muffled figure suddenly passed him and hissed in his ear:

"Doomed! Beware, X. Y. Z!"

With a shudder the man let himself in, and shutting the door behind him, made his way to the warm, well-lighted sitting-room, where his loving wife awaited him.



"Here is a telegram, John," she said, handing him an envelope.

Hastily tearing it open, he drew forth the blank, and there, before his astonished gaze he saw these fearful words:

"Doomed! Beware our vengeance!"

"JACK SPARROW."

Crumpling the paper up in his hand he threw it upon the glowing coals in the grate, and sank into an easy-chair, utterly overcome.

"Have you heard bad news?" asked his wife throwing herself at his feet, and putting her arms about his neck.

"Yes, but do not ask me what. I will tell you some time. Give me my supper."

While the wife was busily engaged laying the little table, the men picked up the evening paper in order to while away the time, being terribly distracted.

The very first thing he saw as he glanced over the evening edition of the *Herald*, was a one line advertisement at the head of the "Personal" column.

No wonder he started for the words were as follows:

"Doomed. X. Y. Z. S. L. of B."

He threw down the paper with a cry of terror, and his wife, attracted by the sound flew to his side.

"What is the matter, John? You are as pale as death. Something has happened! You have never acted like this. What has gone wrong? Won't you tell me?"

"I must, or I shall go mad. Sit down and listen to the strangest tale——"

At that moment a boy's step was heard in the hall outside, together with a joyful whistling.

"Sh! Ned must not hear it. Wait!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LEAGUE IN SESSION.

IN front of a house on Howard street, near the Atheneum, stood two men talking this same night, shortly after the occurrence just narrated.

The habitues of the theater had gathered in force, but as the performance was now under way there were but few people outside.

Occasionally a man would approach, address a few words to the two men, and then pass into the house without further ado.

In the course of half an hour a score of men had entered, one at a time, and as the clock on the Old South Church, not far away, struck the hour of nine, another man came up.

"It is the house?" said he.

"It is," replied both men.

"Then to work."

"He is doomed?"

"He is."

"Go in and we will follow."

Another minute, and the walk in front of the house in Howard street was totally deserted.

Let us see what is taking place within the house this frosty night.

Each man as he entered the house passed along a narrow hallway, and turned down a flight of steps to the cellar.

Here a sentinel was posted who received the password and then opened a door leading to a large, low room, where already quite a number of men had gathered.

At last one of the late comers stepped upon a raised platform at one end of the room, and rapping upon a rough pine table with the butt of a revolver, said loudly:

"Men of the Secret League of Boston, are you all present?"

"All that are true to the League will be found here," responded one of the number.

"Who is absent?"

"John Bryant."

"And he?"

"Is false to his vows and a traitor to our band."

"Then he is doomed. Has he been warned?"

"He has."

"What is his sign?"

"X. Y. Z.," was the answer. "Our brothers, A. B. C., and C. D. E., together with H. I. J. and N. O. P. have to-night warned him."

"It is well. If he heeds not the warning he dies."

"The time has passed for a trial and he is doomed."

"His crimes?"

"The revocation of his vows, the return to an honest life, the repudiation of his associates, and the attempt to cover up the past."

"That is enough. He might betray us at any time. He is certainly doomed!"

"What shall be his fate, most worthy chief?"

"Take away his wealth, deprive him of all that makes life pleasant, break up his home, disgrace his wife, make his son an outcast, and then, when he sees how certain is his doom, when he has fallen to the lowest depth, drag him before our tribunal and torture him to death."

"It is well!" cried all the League in chorus.

The Secret League was a band of desperate men which had lately made Boston its head-quarters, and to which the doomed man had once belonged.

Its members had organized themselves for the perpetration of all manner of crimes, and so well had they taken every precaution that it was almost impossible to discover who they were or where they met.

Every member was bound by the most awful oaths never to betray the secrets of the League, and never to leave it, once having become a member, under pain of death.

They were all bound by their oaths to protect and defend each other, to obey implicitly the commands of the chief, to undertake any work that might be given them; to go anywhere at the slightest notice, and to obey the summons of the chief at once, no matter in what part of the world they might be.

John Bryant had been a member of this band—under what circumstances he had joined it will be presently shown—but having left it was doomed.

The present meeting was one of a number held to take action upon his case, and the League had now formed all its plans and were ready for action.

The chief was a man by the name of Jack Sparrow, though he was known in the League by three letters of the alphabet, that being the means of distinguishing the members.



For instance the men were known as A. B. C., B. C. D., C. D. E., D. E. F., and so on, the man after X. Y. Z. being Y. Z. A., and after him Z. A. B., which finished the list. The doomed man's letters being X. Y. Z., as already mentioned.

John Bryant knew what those mysterious letters in that "Personal" notice meant too well, for in them he read the doom pronounced against himself by the Secret League, and knew that Sparrow was not the man to abate one jot of the vengeance which he had sworn to take upon his former associate.

### CHAPTER III.

#### REVELATIONS OF THE PAST.

As the unfortunate man spoke, the door of the sitting-room was thrown open, and a boy of seventeen entered.

He was handsome and noble-looking, had a merry, ringing laugh, and seemed as careless and happy as though trouble was a thing unknown.

He was neatly dressed, although it did not seem as though he was a boy to feel much over such things, but that his neatness was more a matter of accident than design.

He was fair, with blue eyes, but his hair was of a rich chestnut brown, and clustered in tangled curls about his head and just upon his shapely forehead.

Such was Ned, the doomed man's son; a loving, manly, careless fellow, true as steel, good as gold, and as brave and fearless as a lion.

"How are you, father? Good-evening, mother," he cried, throwing his soft hat into a corner. "I am as hungry as a wolf. I've been tramping all over the Cambridge woods after nuts, and that's what makes me late. You didn't wait supper for *me*, did you?"

"No, no; I was late myself. I have only just come in. We will all have supper together."

Supper was usually a jolly meal, but this night it was not so, although Ned seemed to be in as good spirits as usual, and rattled away as he generally did, having a ready wit, and being as lively a lad as one would want to see.

His father and mother seemed laboring under some restraint, however, and Ned soon subsided, feeling that something was wrong, and trusting that his father would soon explain matters.

"I am going out, father," he said, shortly after supper. "I've found a new chum, and he's a brick. He has asked me to come and see him to-night, and I may stay until morning."

"You haven't thrown aside Harry Atkinson, have you, Ned?"

"Oh, no, Harry and I are good friends still; but Jack is a brick, and all the fellows like him. He thinks the most of me, though, and I am going down to spend the night with him."

"Where does he live?"

"In Harrison Avenue, in a swellish house, and has everything he wants. I guess his father must be rich."

"What is his other name?"

"It's a funny one, pop, and when I heard it I had to laugh. It is Sparrow, Jack Sparrow. That's what we call the little birds that we have in——"

The man's face suddenly turned livid, and he seemed to be choking for breath.

"And this boy is your friend?" he gasped. "Better be dead than—— You must not see him again."

"But, pop, he is just the best fellow that ever was."

"I want you to have nothing to do with him."

"But you don't know him, do you, pop? What's the matter with him?"

"I don't care to talk about it. You must not go out to-night."

"But, father, Harry and the other fellows will be there, only I am going to stay all——"

"You can't go, and that is sufficient."

Ned was greatly surprised, for his father had never spoken even crossly to him, and his tones now betokened great anger, and Ned felt angry in return.

"I don't think it's fair," he began, "to abuse a fellow that you don't know anything about. When all the——"

"Silence!" cried the father, bringing his fist down on the table with a thump. "Take your books and go up to your room. I'll warrant you haven't learned your lessons for to-morrow yet."

"What ails father, mother?" asked Ned, getting his books out of a closet. "I never saw him that way in all my life. I wish we'd leave Boston and go back to the West. It's only since we've been here that he's——"

"Sh, Ned. Your father is worried over something. To-morrow things will be brighter. I will come up before you go to sleep and see you."

After Ned's retreating footsteps had died away his father drew a chair up to the fire, the back turned toward the door, and sitting down, said:

"If I do not tell you what is on my mind, Mary, I shall go mad."

"What is it that troubles you, John; are you embarrassed in your business?"

"Not as yet, but I feel that I am a doomed man."

"What do you mean?"

"In the first place, my name is not John Lovell, but John Bryant, and my past is one to which I cannot look back save with feelings of regret."

"Whatever it may have been before I knew you, John, I do not know; but for the last eighteen years I know of nothing which can cause you shame to think upon."

"I have tried to be true to you, Mary, true to our boy, true to myself."

"And so you have been. With what may have occurred before I met you, I have nothing to do. Let the past go, I do not seek to recall it."

"Others do, and I can't prevent them. I am a doomed man, and it is but right that I should tell you all before I die."

"What do you mean?" she cried, turning pale. "Your health was never better. What fancy has——"

"Listen, for I must have an end to the fearful secret which is preying upon me."

"Go on."

"Twenty years ago I lived in this city, and was known as John Bryant. One of my associates was a man by the name of John Sparrow, the father of this boy whom Ned speaks of."



"Jack Sparrow was wild and dissolute. I was poor and hard-working, and easily flattered by the attentions of those better off than myself. I fell an easy victim to the snares of the wicked.

"This Jack Sparrow had loaned me money to a considerable amount, and not being able to pay him, and needing more to carry on the life I was leading, I forged the name of my employers to a draft, and obtained a large sum.

"Sparrow obtained this draft and held it over my head, threatening to expose me if I did not comply with all his wishes, and do as he said.

"I had now repented of my folly, but it was too late, for the villain had me in his power, and was determined to ruin me sooner or later.

"He induced me to join a secret society, which he said was only a joke and for the sake of fun, and fool that I was, I consented, and did not discover my folly until the commission of several startling crimes by the members of the order awakened me to a sense of my peril."

So interested were both husband and wife in the strange tale that they did not notice the opening of the door leading above, nor see the form of their son standing on the threshold.

Ned had come down to get something he had forgotten, and was about to speak when his father's next words riveted his attention and forced him to keep silence.

"Being a member of the terrible Secret League," continued the man, "and under the power of this villain Jack Sparrow, it was not long before I was called upon to take part in some new crime."

Ned quietly retreated back into the shadow where he could not be seen but where he could hear all that passed.

"Awakened to a sense of my desperate position, I resolved to fly from the horrible place, and in another city, and under a new name endeavor to regain the ground I had lost.

"I consented to take part in the new offense against the laws only to quiet the suspicions of Jack Sparrow and his satellites should any be entertained.

"That night I fled, being afraid to expose the League's misdeeds, and, with what money I had made my way to the West, took the name of John Lovell, and began a new life.

"The turning point was when I met you, and your love for me was the one incentive of my existence. Saved by love I struggled on, until from step to step I became prosperous and thought I had outlived the past.

"Ned was born, grew to be a fine, noble boy, and became the mainstay of my life. You desired that he should finish his education in the East, and in an evil day I returned to Boston.

"I fancied that the League had been broken up, and that no one here would know me, but one day I met Sparrow in the street, and the look he gave me convinced me that he was still my enemy, and would do all in his power to ruin me.

"Mysterious messages began to come to me, vague hints of trouble in store for me, until at last, to-day, having to go out of town, I was several times, upon my return,

warned by members of the League of my approaching fate."

"We will brave it out and defeat the scoundrels."

"No, no, I cannot. You do not know in how many ways they can assail me. Already I see the effect of their plottings.

"Ned has been drawn into the net, my business has begun to suffer, and even your honor and happiness have been threatened, as I know by letters I have received.

"The scoundrels have long been working in silence, but now I feel that their schemes are ripe, and that the crash must presently come. It is this knowledge that has so troubled me, and I know that I am slowly going mad."

"No, no, it must not be; we must fight these villains to the bitter end, and keep the past forever a secret. Rely on me and all will be bright once again. You shall be saved, never fear."

"He shall, indeed," said Ned, to himself, "and be it my task to undertake the work!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### NED CONCLUDES TO TAKE A HAND.

As John Lovell finished his reminiscences, he arose to his feet and glanced around him as if distracted.

The open door met his gaze, and he stepped out into the hall.

By that time, however, Ned had swiftly and noiselessly retreated, and was safe up-stairs in his own room.

"How careless of Ned to leave the door open," said the man, returning and closing it. "You don't suppose he heard?"

"No, but if he had, Ned is too discreet——"

"It is not that, but I don't like the idea of his being in with that young Sparrow; the boy might try to pump him, or worse yet, might intimate to Ned that I was a criminal, so as to poison his mind against me."

"No, he could not do that, for Ned is too true, too noble-hearted, to believe anything that others might say against you."

"And I would not shake his faith by revealing to him, myself even, the terrible truth."

"But you have committed no crimes—you left the League when you discovered the nature——"

"Yes, but that forged note! Sparrow holds it in his possession, and may produce it at any moment."

"If he dares to show his hand you can expose his own villainies."

"Ah, he will be too cautious for that. You do not know the depth of the scoundrel. He will attack me, and yet leave no loophole open by which we can get at him."

Ned was now listening intently just outside the door, being certain that more would be said, and resolving to learn all he could in order to know better how to act.

"You must not fret," said the devoted wife. "Let us to-morrow lay this case before the police, and rely on their aid to defeat these villains. Forewarned is forearmed, and now that you know of their intentions, let us thwart them."

"But think of the exposure! I can bear it, but you and Ned—oh! no, I cannot. I tell you I am doomed!"

"No one need know anything but the police, and they



will keep the secret. Attack these wretches in their stronghold, and defeat them at their own games."

"You are more hopeful than I, because you do not know the hellish ingenuity of this man Sparrow. He has a hundred means within his grasp of blighting and cursing my life, despite all our efforts. And one can no more tell when and how he will strike than you can determine the direction of the thunder-bolt. Oh! I shall go mad with this anxiety—this hideous suspense!"

He strode towards the door leading above, and threw it open, but Ned had already anticipated the movement, and, as before, succeeded in getting away without being discovered.

He did not care to take any more risks, however, and therefore remained in his room awaiting the time when his mother should come up.

Lovell, worn out and distracted, threw himself at full length upon the little sofa opposite the fire, and burying his face in the cushions made no sound, though it was evident that his throbbing brain must prevent his going to sleep.

The wife remained at the fireside sewing for more than an hour, when her husband's heavy and regular breathing told her that at last he was asleep.

Bending softly over him, she soon convinced herself that he was indeed asleep, and that exhausted nature had asserted herself, and was now taking the best means toward recuperation.

Quietly laying down her work the devoted woman noiselessly left the room, allowing the door to remain open, and stole quickly and silently up to Ned's chamber.

Her soft rap was instantly answered, and Ned, still up and dressed, drew her into the room, closed the door, and throwing his arms about her neck, kissed her on both cheeks, and said:

"I know all, mother dear, and mean to save him."

"Ned!"

"Fear not; the doom that these miscreants have pronounced shall never fall upon my father's head. I care not for the forgotten past; the present is sufficient for me. He has been good and kind to us both, and I will not see him suffer for an act done years ago, and under circumstances of great provocation."

"But you do not understand the difficulties which are in the way of combating his enemies. This Secret League is——"

"I know everything." And Ned briefly told his mother what he had heard, and under what circumstances.

"Your father wished to keep this knowledge from you, Ned."

"He need not have done so for I love him none the less. Since you are now in my secret, let us go down and take counsel with him as to what had better be done."

"Let us leave the city at once, Ned. You were happier in the west."

"No, we must stay here and fight the villains on their own ground."

"But your father——"

"He will agree with me when I tell him my plans. Let us go now and tell him everything."

Mother and son left the room hand in hand, and made their way quickly down-stairs.

The sitting-room door was still open, and a flood of light poured out into the little hall.

Upon entering the room, however, though everything else was as before, the threatened man was missing.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GAME OPENS.

MARY LOVELL had left her husband lying asleep on the little sofa when she went up to Ned's room, and now he was gone.

Their own bedroom was on the upper floor, and had he gone there she would certainly have heard his footsteps while talking to Ned.

Had she not done so even, she must have met the man on his way up, for the interval was too short to admit of his having been able to reach his room without being seen.

Then, too, missing her from the sitting-room he would certainly have called to her to know where she was.

The first thought was that in his distraction he had left the house to wander aimlessly about the streets, or maybe seek the members of the League at their secret rendezvous.

But the front door was found to be locked, and the key on the inside as Ned had left it after letting himself in.

A quick examination of the four rooms upon this lower floor revealed the fact that the man was not in them.

His hat and coat were hanging up in the hall, and his street shoes were upon the hearth, where he had placed them when putting on his slippers.

"Run up-stairs, mother," cried Ned, "and make sure that he is not there. I will wait here and see if he is hiding somewhere."

The lady's search was a brief one, for there were only the rooms occupied by herself and husband and by Ned, besides a spare one for an occasional guest, to be searched, and in neither was any trace of the man found.

"The windows!" said Ned suddenly, to himself, as his mother was still up-stairs.

Those in the sitting-room were found to be fastened, so that there seemed to be no chance that the man had made his way into the street through them.

The windows in the rear room had no fastenings, and were closed from the outside, besides being only lightly secured.

It was just possible that the man might have departed in this way, though why he had not taken the front was a puzzle, since he could go nowhere after getting into the back yard, the sides of which were bound by very high fences, and the rear by a large brick building which abutted on the rears of half a dozen houses on that block.

When Ned had made these investigations his mother returned and reported her non-success.

"If you will remain here I will go to the chief of police and have an alarm sent out. You are not afraid?" he asked.

"No; but had we not better see our neighbors? Your father may have run in to some of their houses."

"If he has left the house he has been spirited away, and it will not do to waste time. I must see the police."

"Do as you think best, and do not be afraid to leave me alone, for I will be brave and strong."



As Ned was about putting on his hat there came a sharp ring at the front door.

Throwing it open he admitted his chum Harry Atkinson, and, to his great surprise, his new acquaintance, Jack Sparrow.

"You didn't show up," said the latter carelessly, "and Harry and I thought we'd come around and see if you were sick."

Ned showed the boys into the sitting-room, and then said, after giving his mother a peculiar look:

"Father is detained on business, Harry, and I must go out. Will you stay with mother till I return? I will take Jack for company, if you don't mind."

Harry was too much of a gentleman to refuse, although he would have much preferred going out with Ned, being a trifle jealous of the latter's growing intimacy with Jack.

Ned's mother, knowing that he must have some good reason for wanting to be alone with young Sparrow, gave Harry one of her sweetest smiles, and said that she knew he was dying to pay her a visit all by herself, and that this was an opportunity not to be lost.

That settled the business, and Ned, after briefly introducing Jack, took him away again.

Ten o'clock struck as the two boys passed through the gates upon the Common, and when the notes had died away, Ned said suddenly:

"Jack Sparrow, what do you know of the Secret League of which your father is the chief?"

"What do you mean? He isn't a Freemason or a member of any other secret order."

"Not of the Secret League, a band of criminals bound together by the most terrible oaths for the purposes of crime? Do you deny that he is the leader of that body, and that he and his associates have doomed my father to death?"

"Your father? Why, dad don't know him even, for I asked him this very night."

"Maybe he knows him as John Bryant. Perhaps he could tell you of a certain old paper he possesses which he once used to threaten my father into compliance with his wishes."

"What are you talking about? You grow mistier every minute."

"Did he send you to my house to-night to spy out anything—to get information which he and his evil companions could use against us—or did he send you as a decoy that I, as well as others, might be caught in the clutches of the Secret League?"

"Are you spouting from some new play, or talking in earnest?"

"What is your father's business?"

"He has retired, but was formerly in a large banking house in Boston."

"Do you belong to the Secret League?"

"I don't know what you are driving at."

"Did your father send you to my house to-night?"

"No, he is sick, and went to bed at seven o'clock. Harry proposed that we should call on you after the other fellows had gone."

"Are you speaking the truth?"

"I am not in the habit of telling falsehoods," retorted

the other hotly. "Did you bring me out here just to insult me? If you did, I'll go home."

"Hold on, Jack," cried Ned, seizing his comrade's arm and detaining him. "I've got a mystery to solve, and maybe you can help me to do it. Will you go with me to police head-quarters?"

"What for?"

"To make inquiries for my father, and to expose this Secret League."

"What is that?"

"A band of criminals who have threatened my father's life. Their leader is a man called Jack Sparrow."

"What new insult is this? That is my name——"

"And your father's, though John is the usual way of speaking of him."

"Do you dare to say that my father is leagued with criminals—that he is a common, low——"

"One Jack Sparrow is at the head of the Secret League. I know not if he is your father. My father's life has been threatened by these men; he has most suddenly and mysteriously disappeared this very evening, and I wish to investigate the affair."

"And you suspect my father of being mixed up in it? I thought you were my friend, Ned, but I am afraid——"

"Stop, Jack," cried the other, still detaining his companion. "Tell me truly, old fellow, that you know nothing of this affair, nothing of the existence of the Secret League?"

"Upon my word, I don't, Ned."

"I believe you, old fellow, but when you hear what I've got to say, you can understand my excitement."

Ned thus briefly, as they made their way through the Common, told his companion what he had learned.

"I cannot believe that my father is the same man as this criminal," said Jack, "but for my sake, as well as yours, this mystery must be fathomed."

They had reached Tremont street, and were hurrying down it, when two men suddenly sprang upon the lads and seized them.

They both struggled to escape, when suddenly the light from a street lamp fell upon Jack's face, and the man who had seized him released him with a cry of astonishment.

"There's some mistake here, Jack," he said quickly, turning his attention to Ned.

Ned had succeeded in breaking away from his persecutor, but just then the other fell upon him and seized him.

"Help!" shouted Jack, springing to the rescue of his friend.

Again and again the cry rang out, while the boy's fists beat a vigorous tattoo upon the man's skull and face. Hurrying footsteps were now heard, and with a muttered curse the man whom Jack had assailed, suddenly let fly with his right hand and then darted off.

He did not strike, but the air was suddenly filled with a fine, pungent powder, which entered the eyes of both boys, causing the greatest pain and irritation.

Blinded and smarting with pain they dropped upon their knees, and the two men dashed away in the darkness, the direction they took being unobserved by the lads, who could scarcely see for the pain.

When two policemen presently arrived, Ned, giving his



companion a nudge, said that they had been attacked by footpads, who, finding themselves likely to be severely dealt with, had thrown red pepper into their eyes and had thus escaped.

A wash at a neighboring fountain greatly relieved the pain, and then both lads started for the office of the chief of police, in order to give information concerning what Ned had learned.

"The game has opened," he muttered to himself, "but as yet I cannot tell whether my partner is not a confederate of my opponents. However, I can play a good lone-hand if necessary."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A TEMPORARY DISADVANTAGE.

"WHAT do you think now, Jack?" asked Ned, as they hurried on. "One of these men evidently recognized you, for you saw that he let you alone, and called to his pal that some mistake had been made."

"I only know that if my dad is concerned in this job, I shall have nothing to do with it, and shall oppose him as bitterly as you yourself."

"Good! Forgive me for ever having doubted you, old fellow. I know that I can trust you now, and together we will fight these fellows to the very end."

As the clocks were striking the hour of eleven, the boys stood in front of police head-quarters, and were about ascending the steps, when a man came down and addressed them.

"Whom do you wish to see? The building is closed to visitors."

"We have business with the chief of police," said Ned, not doubting that the man was a janitor or some other official.

"You can enter by the side door, just around the corner. I will show you the way myself."

The man was pleasant spoken, and Ned, catching sight of his face, thought him rather fine-looking, and a person worthy to be trusted.

He had, therefore, no hesitation in following him, and the three descended together, and turned down a narrow alley at one side of the building, at the further end of which a green light was burning.

"There you are," said the man suddenly, when they were about half way down the alley.

At these words there came the sound of a low whistle, and from either side of the alley, scarcely six feet in width, sprang a masked man from some place of concealment utterly indistinguishable.

In an instant both boys were seized and hurried away in opposite directions, their conductors saying with a laugh:

"Sold! When two boys can outwit the Secret League, it will be time to shut up shop!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Ned was hurried away so rapidly that he had no idea in what direction he was being taken, his captors—for the first man was soon joined by others—having bound, blind-folded, and gagged him as they ran, and thrown him headlong into a carriage, which rattled away over the rough stones at a most lively rate.

He could not move hand nor foot, and, lying as he was, in the bottom of the carriage, received many a bump and bruise, until it seemed as though every bone he had would be shattered.

This sort of thing was kept up for some time, in fact he heard a clock striking the hour of midnight as he rattled on, and thought, from the tones, that it was the Old South which he heard.

Shortly afterward the carriage came to a standstill, and he was lifted out and borne hurriedly into a house as it seemed to him from the sound of the men's footsteps.

He was soon thrown upon the floor in a damp, foul-smelling room and left to himself, his captors not taking the trouble to untie him or remove the gag in his mouth or the bandage about his eyes.

The former had become loosened, and it was not long before he was able to get rid of it, and then by working his head back and forth on the rough floor cut the knot of the bandage and caused it to fall off.

He could see nothing, however, the place being as dark as a pocket, but for all that he determined to get rid of his bonds if possible, so that when his captors should visit him he might be able to do something in his own behalf.

His hands were fastened together behind his back, but, the rough jolting and bouncing, together with his own struggles to get free, had loosened the cords somewhat and he had little difficulty in passing his legs through his arms, and thus getting his hands in front of him.

Then with his teeth and by working his wrists back and forth he succeeded after a time in freeing his hands, which was a great gain, as now he could work at his feet, although the darkness was a disadvantage.

Despite this, however, he tugged away, feeling instead of seeing, and after some little time had the great satisfaction of feeling the knots loosening and the strain upon his limbs slackening.

He kept on with his work, and by following the ends of the cords with his fingers soon had the whole thing as plainly in his mind as though he were able to see.

He worked faster after that, and presently drew one leg out of the noose, it being but the work of a few moments to release the other.

Just as he had freed himself from the last cord he heard a noise outside, as though some one were turning a key in a lock, and immediately afterwards a door swung open and a gleam of light was seen on the wall in front of him.

Turning quickly, he beheld a man standing in an open doorway, holding a lantern, which latter had afforded the light he had seen.

The first thought that entered his head was that he must escape.

His jailer would not expect to find him unbound, and he must therefore act upon the instant.

With a low cry he sprang forward and threw himself upon the man before the latter could guess his purpose.

Boy as he was, he came rushing on with such terrible force that, despite his slight weight, he overturned the stalwart jailer and sprawled him out upon the floor, the light falling from his hand and being quickly extinguished.

The passage was lighter than the dungeon, however,



there being a hanging lamp at the further end, which furnished all the illumination our hero needed.

Luckily for him, the man had struck his head so heavily as to be partly insensible, and in that condition was not so well able to resist the lad as he would otherwise have been.

Time was precious, and without further ado Ned seized the man by the legs and, exerting all his strength, dragged him just within the cellar, for so he knew it to be, now that there was light.

The key was still in the lock, and without stopping to bind or gag the man, the boy hastily swung the door into its place and locked it, dropping the key into his pocket.

"So-so!" he muttered; "this fellow is caged, and the alarm is not yet given. Now to escape from this place, and put the police on the track of these villains, and prevent the doom which they have pronounced upon my poor father from falling!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### WITHIN AN INCH OF DEATH.

WHEN Jack Sparrow was hurried away he was not treated as roughly as Ned, but was merely hustled off to a back room in a drinking-saloon not far distant, where he was placed in a chair, and found himself in the company of three men, all strangers to him.

"Now, young fellow," said the one who had brought him thither, "we don't want to hurt you on your dad's account."

"Not unless you meddle with what don't concern you," put in a second man, with a grin.

"Do you men belong to the Secret League—the mysterious band that has doomed Ned Lovell's father to death?"

"Yes; and Ned, too, in time, and Ned's mother, and the whole tribe of them. The man is doomed; and when the Secret League says any one shall die, there is no preventing it."

These words were said by the third man, who until then had not spoken a syllable.

"And what has my father got to do with my being unmolested provided I keep silence? Do you dare tell me that he is mixed up in any such a dastardly affair as this?"

"I do, Jack Sparrow; your father is our chief."

"Oh, my God!" and the poor fellow, horrified at this declaration, fell forward, his head resting upon the table and his arms covering his face.

"This information, if you reveal it, will cost you your life! Keep it to yourself, preserve your own counsel, and do not meddle with what concerns you not, and you are safe."

"He must take the oath," said the first man, "or we shall be betrayed. Our chief must deny his own son if he is false, or he incurs the anger of the League. If he takes the oath, the chief is bound like us all."

"Do you swear," asked number three, "that you will never reveal what you have heard this night—never to meddle with the affairs of the League—never to tell any one, not even your own father, what you now know, under pain of death?"

"I will take no oaths!" cried Jack, springing up, "and

with my last breath will I denounce you all, and do my utmost to bring you to justice!"

"Upon him!" cried his questioner. "He dies if he refuses!"

"Cowards!" cried Jack, quickly placing his back against the wall. "Three against one! Give me a weapon and I will fight you one at a time and teach you better manners."

"Will you take the oaths?"

"Never!"

"Then you die!"

At that the three men drew long, keen daggers from some place of hiding and advanced in a body upon the lad, their eyes gleaming forth hate and vengeance, their arms upraised for the fatal blow.

Jack never flinched, but folding his arms across his breast, stood facing his would-be murderers with a look of scorn upon his young face.

"If my father is your chief," he said, "you dare not harm me, as you value your lives."

Number three advanced beyond the others, and suddenly made a dart towards the lad with his right hand.

Instead of the steel's descending, however, a fine stream of some pungent liquid or vapor was suddenly ejected from its point full into the boy's face.

He was instantly stupefied, losing all power over his limbs, and falling in a limp mass upon the floor.

"He's dosed," muttered the man, "and won't wake up for all night, and, with a handkerchief over his nose, not for another night."

Jack was then lifted up and placed upon a low lounge in the further corner of the room, where he lay as if dead, though he was merely in a deep sleep, from which he would not awaken for many hours.

\* \* \* \* \*

Long did Ned's mother and Harry await for the boys' return, but in vain.

Midnight came, and neither he nor Jack had returned, and the poor woman began to fear that something terrible had happened.

Her husband had not put in an appearance, and she was well-nigh distracted at the thought that perhaps he was now a corpse, his body lying in some neglected spot, perhaps never to be found.

Ned, too, might be doomed to a like fate, and if so who could tell whether she herself might not be the next victim.

The vengeance of the Secret League seemed to be falling, despite her assurance to her husband that she would save him.

At last she could stand the suspense no longer, and when the clock on the mantel struck the hour of two and the wanderer had not returned, she told Harry she was going out, and for him to remain and wait for the others.

It was with great difficulty that he could be persuaded to do this; but the devoted woman at last carried her point, and, hastily assuming her bonnet and shawl, went out into the night.

She did not take the road followed by Ned, not caring to cross the Common alone so late at night, but followed a street which led along the side, a longer route to be sure, but under the circumstances a safer one.



The streets were almost deserted, the air being keen and cold, and the east wind whistling shrilly down the dreary streets.

She would occasionally meet a pedestrian, and at such times would hurry by, fearful of being stopped or spoken to.

Once or twice she asked her way of policemen, who gave her the information desired without questions, her appearance being in her favor, and supposing her to be some poor woman desirous of making a complaint against some brute of a husband, or possibly to hunt up some wandering boy who had strayed from the home-fold.

At last she arrived at police head-quarters, and as she ascended the steps was met by a man coming down, who asked her her errand at that late hour.

She had resolved to trust no one, and, therefore, ran hurriedly up, eluding the man, who made a savage grasp at her fluttering shawl.

This he seized and held firmly, but the brave woman quickly allowed it to slip from her shoulders, and gained the top landing.

A light was shining just ahead of her, and she knew that the offices were open.

"Stop—stop!" called the man, "the place is closed, you can't go in there, you must take the other door."

She had seen the words "Chief of Police" on a sign over an open door, however, and that was sufficient.

In an instant a thought flashed over her mind.

This man was a spy of the League placed there to prevent her from accomplishing her purpose.

Doubtless he had waylaid the two boys, and this would account for their non-appearance, for Ned would certainly have sent word of some kind even if he could not come in person.

As she thought this she retreated still further, and, turning upon the man, said, hastily:

"I know you to be a spy of the Secret League! Beware, for vengeance is about to overtake you. Be warned in time, for you are doomed!"

The man staggered as if a blow had been struck him, and it was by the merest chance that he did not fall headlong down the stone steps.

"Curse her!" he muttered, "she might do us a mischief after all. She *must* be stopped!"

Summoning all his energies he bounded forward, and whipping out a revolver fired at her head.

Could he kill her she could never tell her story, for the dead tell no tales.

It was a great risk to run, but the consequences of her obtaining a hearing might be fatal.

Crack!

The shot rang out quick and sharp, and the bullet sped upon its errand of death.

There would be an alarm and confusion, and he must get away betimes, but this was nothing to him if he accomplished his purpose.

Should the hurrying officials find a dead woman lying on the marble pavement and the murderer missing, they would never know why she had been killed and what she might have told had she lived.

Consequently he had everything to lose if she escaped him, and upon this shot he risked all.

The bullet whizzed through the braids of the poor woman's hair, and passed within the slightest possible distance of her scalp.

It flattened against the wall and fell to the floor with a dull sound.

Saved!

The first shot had missed, but the second must do its work.

Crack!

Too late!

The man's aim was poor, and as the woman rushed through the open door-way, the bullet passed over her head and shivered the glass in the fan-light.

A few moments later she was relating her strange story to the chief of police.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CAPTURED BY THE LEAGUE.

How had John Lovell so mysteriously disappeared, and where was he at present?

When his wife had gone up-stairs to Ned's room, having hardly reached the floor above, there was heard a slight noise at the front door.

On either side were long narrow panes of glass, which served during the day to admit light.

The sound mentioned seemed to be that of breaking one of these panes, though it was so slight as not to be heard on the upper floor.

Had any one been there they would have seen a piece of glass, about six inches square, suddenly pulled right from out the pane, leaving a hole large enough to admit a man's hand.

Without caring to be too mysterious, we will say at once what had happened.

During the interview between John Lovell and his wife, the house had been closely watched by spies of the Secret League.

One had been posted close to the window of the little sitting-room, and heard all that had passed.

Another was on the stoop, and this man, by means of a diamond point, had cut out a square hole in the little panes inside the door.

In order not to allow the piece of glass to fall, and perhaps cause a disturbance, he had affixed a leather "sucker" to it, and pulled it adroitly from its place.

This was at the time when Mrs. Lovell had reached the upper-floor.

He instantly thrust in his hand, and turning the key in the lock unfastened the door.

In another instant he had admitted himself and two comrades, the three stealing noiselessly to the little sitting-room.

The soles of their boots were protected by thick pieces of felt, which prevented any sound from being heard.

Hurrying quickly into the room the leader clapped a handkerchief saturated with chloroform over the face of the sleeping man, and in an instant he was unconscious.

In a twinkling the three had carried him outside without



having caused the least alarm, for not a word had been spoken, not a sound made.

Closing and locking the door as before, the leader, rubbing the edges of the piece of glass with some adhesive liquid, replaced it as it had been, and then, letting the air in under one edge of his leather pad easily released it, leaving the glass in place.

To a casual observer, and particularly in the night, the glass would appear to have been undisturbed.

Even to one who might examine it now more particularly, there would appear nothing but a slight scratch or crack, and not one man in a hundred would suspect the actual truth.

Thus it happened that both mother and son were misled, and came to the conclusion that the man must have left by the rear.

The men hurried away with their captive, and while one remained to watch the house, the others took a carriage standing ready in an adjacent street, and hastened to the rendezvous of the League.

The man left to watch the house was the one who subsequently followed the two boys, and put his comrade on the track, a sentinel having been before posted in front of police head-quarters to prevent an alarm being given.

Had Mrs. Lovell gone through the Common, she would have encountered one of the spies, but not having done so, she escaped, the man on the steps being the first one she met.

When Lovell awoke, he found himself sitting in a chair, to which he was bound hand and foot, and in front of him were the members of the Secret League, sitting as a court of justice to pronounce upon his case.

"X. Y. Z., you have been doomed by your former associates to die. What have you to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

Thus spoke the leader, and the unfortunate captive at once recognized his old enemy, Jack Sparrow, though he was closely masked.

"Nothing; only spare my wife and boy, and you may do with me as you will."

"Will you return to the League?"

"Never! I renounce you forever!"

"Had you your liberty, would you attempt to betray us?"

"No; but I wish never more to see or hear of you. I would return to the West, and never trouble you."

"You have broken your vows. Do you know the penalty?"

"I was compelled to join your League, and never took part in your crimes."

"You forget the forged note," and Sparrow held out a time-stained paper. "I could ruin you even now by producing that."

"Must I forever suffer for a moment of folly? My old employees are dead. I cannot be harmed by such an accusation at this late day."

The man laughed scornfully, and then said:

"You might, perhaps, escape harm in that direction, but you will never escape us; you are *doomed*!"

"DOOMED!" cried all the members of the Secret League, in deep chorus.

"You hear?"

"Yes."

"Do you not beg for mercy?"

"Only for my wife and son."

"They, too, shall perish, and you shall see their dying agonies."

"No, no, you would not be so cruel; you would not——"

"Bring in your prisoners."

The poor man groaned in agony, for he was certain that the loved ones had been taken, and that he should be forced to witness their suffering, and he unable to offer them the slightest aid.

He tugged at his bonds, but in vain, and the chief only laughed, while one of the men went away in obedience to the order just given.

This man was now lying unconscious in the cell which Ned had occupied, the boy being at that moment making his way along the passage vainly endeavoring to find a way out of this horrible place.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SECRET LEAGUE LOSES ITS LEADER.

NED hurried along the passage until he came to the end, where a light was suspended over a door.

Putting his ear to the keyhole he listened, but hearing no sound, turned the knob and pushed it open.

He found himself in a small room, dimly lighted, which seemed to be used as a sort of armory, there being racks around two sides containing guns, pistols and knives.

Selecting two pistols and loading them from a lot of cartridges which he found in a drawer, he stuck them into his pocket and proceeded in his investigations.

He discovered several steel breast-plates hanging on a peg, and then knew why his father had been unable to kill the man he had fired at on the Common, having heard the story from his father's own lips while talking to his wife.

At the further side of the room was a door, and the boy was making his way toward this when it was suddenly opened and a man appeared.

"A spy!" shouted the man, darting back into the room he had just left.

An instant hubbub was raised, and a number of men came flocking out.

The foremost sprang upon the lad, and grappled with him, Ned pulling off his mask in the struggle.

He recognized the man as Sparrow by his resemblance to Jack.

Exerting his strength he threw the man down, and kneeling on his breast drew one of his pistols, and cried:

"Advance at your peril! One step, and your leader dies!"

The man made a sudden motion with one hand, and put something to his lips.

Thinking he was about to take poison, Ned dashed away the hand, and a small steel tube pointed at one end and perforated with many fine holes, fell to the floor.

A lot of fine powder fell out, and Ned then knew how he and Jack had been blinded by the man they had met, and who had tried to capture them on the Common.

All the men of the League were evidently possessed of



these tubes, which could be most effective weapons when at close quarters.

"Upon him!" yelled Sparrow. "He must not escape."

At the same moment a paper fell from his breast, and fluttered to the floor.

Ned quickly seized it in one hand, still holding a revolver to the man's head with the other, and ran his eyes over it.

It was the forged note which Sparrow had so long threatened the boy's father with.

Thrusting it into his mouth, Ned soon rendered it totally indecipherable, and spat the fragments out upon the floor.

All this had not occupied half a minute of time, so rapidly did the events come thronging upon each other.

"Seize him!" yelled Sparrow again. "Shoot the young imp! Shoot him, I say!"

A dozen men drew their revolvers and pressed forward.

"The first man that levels a pistol signs the death-warrant of his chief!"

Thus spoke the brave boy as he pressed the muzzle of the revolver against the man's temple, at the same time striking down his hands and putting his foot upon them.

"Are you all cowards? Seize the brat, I say, and——"

"Silence!" and Ned covered the men of the League with his second weapon.

Any one of them might have suddenly fired, but they knew not which of their number might be killed, and none of them cared to take the risk.

They knew by the boy's determined manner that he would certainly carry out his threat, and dispatch their chief, and without him they felt that the band could not longer exist.

"Upon him!" yelled Sparrow, making a sudden movement and throwing Ned upon his back on the floor.

Then his confederates rushed forward, weapons in hand.

Crack!

Ned, upon his back, fired a shot at random, struck the lamp over the door and extinguished it,

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The men of the League fired a volley towards the door, whither they apprehended the plucky boy was making his way.

"My God! I am killed!"

It was their chief who had uttered these startling words.

He himself had started for the door, hoping to intercept Ned, and, his footsteps being mistaken for those of the boy, he had been shot down by his own men.

The doom he had pronounced upon his former victim had fallen upon his own head.

He fell to the floor with an awful crash, and with a curse upon his lips expired.

The double life had come to an end, and men would know how the wealthy retired banker, and the chief of the despised Secret League, were one and the same person.

As he fell to the floor, close beside Ned, the lad leaped to his feet and bounding through the door slammed it behind him with a loud sound.

Hurrying along the darkened passage he suddenly came

against a door, which he took to be that of the cell wherein he had just fastened the guard.

There was a key in the lock, and, turning it, he swung the door open, intending to extract some information from his prisoner as to the means of getting out of this place.

To his surprise he suddenly discovered that he had not opened the door of the cell, but one leading to another passage lighted by a hanging lamp.

At the further end he could see a flight of steps, and, not doubting that this was the way out, he uttered a cry of delight.

At the same time he heard a shout behind him, and, looking over his shoulder, saw several of the League men hurrying after him, the light from the other passage having betrayed his presence.

Snatching the key from the lock, he sprang through, closed and locked the door behind him, with scarcely a minute to spare, and then, dropping the key upon the floor, hurried towards the stairs.

As he sprang up a door at the top was opened, and a man came hurrying down.

Thrusting his head forward with great velocity, Ned took the fellow in the pit of the stomach, and made him turn a complete somersault down to the bottom of the flight.

Without stopping to see whether the man had broken his neck or not, Ned flew up the stairs, and along the narrow hallway, dimly-lighted and musty-smelling.

He reached a door which was double-locked, but which he opened just as a noise below him gave evidence that his enemies were again in pursuit.

He bounded out into the street, and, hurriedly taking his bearings, made a mental note of the house and surroundings so that he might know them again, and then fled down the street at a rapid pace.

## CHAPTER X.

### EXCITING INCIDENTS.—CONCLUSION.

THE house was the one in Howard street, and Ned presently recognized the neighborhood, having visited the Athenæum once or twice with his chum, Harry Atkinson.

"Now to the nearest police-station!" he muttered, hurrying off.

A few minutes later he stood in front of the desk in the station, relating his remarkable story.

A general alarm had been already sent out from headquarters, which had been received only about fifteen minutes at this particular station.

"You are Ned Lovell?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Your mother has just given information concerning this band of criminals, and your news comes in time to aid us."

"Where has she gone?"

"I will find out;" and the captain went to the telegraph instrument and was soon dispatching a message over the wires to the office of the chief of police.

"She has returned home under the protection of an officer," was the reply which Ned presently received to his question.

"Won't you send a squad of men around to the house in



Howard street with me? I fear my father will be murdered by those fiends."

"I will do so as soon as possible. You are a plucky lad, and I trust nothing will happen to your father."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ten minutes later the house in Howard street was raided by the police.

The secret passages and rooms were found, but the members of the Secret League had fled.

The body of Sparrow was found in the armory, and Ned's prisoner was released from the cell, being still unconscious; but of John Lovell or any of the League not a trace could be found.

The man was recognized as an old offender by the police, and was taken into custody, the dead body of Sparrow being sent to the morgue.

The house had long been suspected of being the resort of persons of doubtful character; but that it was the rendezvous of such an organization as the Secret League was never dreamed of.

It has long passed out of existence now, a row of handsome buildings being erected on the site, and probably but few persons are living who remember it.

The decamping of the gang of evil-doers was a great disappointment to both Ned and the police; but the place was at once put under surveillance, in the hope that some of the band might return after a time.

Ned returned home, where he found his mother and Harry, and after a joyful reunion they all retired, for the night was far spent.

How had the Secret League succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the police?

The man whom Ned had hurled down-stairs was the spy who had attempted to kill Mrs. Lovell at police headquarters.

He had at once posted off to the rendezvous in hot haste, and had he arrived a few minutes sooner, might have intercepted Ned.

He soon recovered from the very decided shaking up the lad had given him, and released his companions.

It was decided to abandon the place at once and fly to parts unknown.

Not an instant was to be lost, as now that Ned had escaped, they knew not at what moment the boy might bring the police down upon them.

Dragging their prisoner along with them, they hurriedly left, not caring to take Sparrow's dead body with them, and knowing nothing of Ned's prisoner.

Once in the street they scattered in every direction, and scarcely had they made good their escape when the police arrived.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day the city was thrown into a fever of excitement by the reports of the thrilling events of the previous night.

Jack Sparrow awoke late in the afternoon, with a splitting headache, and found himself in a strange room, it being some time before he could recollect where he was.

He began an investigation of the place, and was looking for a means of escape when he suddenly heard voices just outside.

Throwing himself upon the lounge, where he had been asleep, he saw a door which he had not hitherto noticed, open, and three men enter the place hurriedly.

"There is Sparrow's brat," said one; "we'd better get rid of him."

"What's the good? His dad's out of the way of hurting anybody, and the kid don't know anything about the gang."

"Maybe he won't get over the dose we gave him. If so, we'd better throw him down a sewer and let him drift out into the bay."

Jack shuddered, but fortunately the men did not notice this, having just sat down at a table with their backs toward him.

"The League is busted up, sure enough?"

"Yes, and Red Cleary, the sneak-thief, is taken."

"Nobody knew he was in the place, or we wouldn't have left him there."

"That's all right, Joe. He won't squeal. All he'll get will be a couple of years at Charlestown State Prison."

"The cops are bound to find us out, Bob."

"They won't do it. How about the doomed man, Tom?"

"He's in the cellar. We had better settle him right away."

"It's none of our funeral. He was Sparrow's victim, and Sparrow is dead!"

Jack clapped his hand over his mouth to repress a cry of horror, but only partly succeeded.

The noise he made aroused the three men, and they quickly turned towards him.

The boy was lying perfectly still with his face to the wall, and gave no sign of having yet awakened from his sleep.

"He's all right," muttered Tom. "Suppose we settle the fellow down below."

"Better let him go."

"And have him blow on the hull gang? No, sir! We'd ought to have settled him last night, instead of bringing him to this place."

Two of the men were in favor of getting rid of Lovell at once, and at last the timid man consented to help them.

"We'll knock him in the head," muttered Tom, "and to-night chuck him in the bay."

"All right. Let's go for him now," added Joe. "He'll have to pay for the life of our chief, and the trouble his boy Ned gave us."

"Come," said Tom again, "this way down."

He then removed the table, lifted a square of carpet, and revealed a trap-door, which he lifted and turned back.

The three men descended a short flight of steps, and when they had disappeared, Jack suddenly leaped to his feet, slammed down the trap, overturned the table upon it, and finding the catch of the secret-door hurried from the place.

He was in a long, narrow hallway, and, hastening along this, soon reached a door which led into the street.

In a few moments he had found a policeman, and hurriedly explained the situation.

\* \* \* \* \*

John Lovell was seated, bound, upon a rude bench in a noisome cellar, where he had been for many hours, having



been brought thither from the house in Howard street, when three men suddenly entered.

There was sufficient light in the place for him to see their faces, and he knew at once by their expressions that they had come to kill him.

"Have you come to add murder to your other crimes?" he asked.

"That's just it," muttered Tom, producing a slung-shot, and advancing with a savage leer towards his intended victim.

"Give me one chance for my life. Let me have my arms free. Do not kill me like a rat."

"Nixey," growled Joe, producing a bludgeon. "Now then, boys!"

The three men made a rush, and the prisoner springing to his feet uttered a piercing scream for help.

"Quick! He'll arouse the whole neighborhood."

"Help! Help! Hel——"

Tom seized the man by the throat, and clapping a rough hand over his mouth prevented further cries.

Joe tripped the victim up, and then Bob sprang forward, cudgel in hand, to do the bloody work.

Hurrying footsteps were suddenly heard, and then a boyish voice exclaimed:

"There they are! Quick, or we shall be too late!"

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Jack Sparrow and the officer had arrived none too soon.

Three shots rang out from the policeman's trusty weapon, and Joe received a bullet in the head.

Another struck Bob in the wrist, and caused the billy to fall from his hand.

The third flew so close to Tom's head that he thought he was killed and fell to the floor with a groan.

John Lovell had been rescued in the nick of time, by the son of his old enemy.

One of the ruffians escaped, and one was dead, but the other was taken and soon lodged in jail.

The habitues of the saloon, hearing the shooting and discovering the presence of the officer, took leg bail and got away, some of them being lesser members of the Secret League.

The doom pronounced upon John Lovell had been averted, and he was restored to his beloved wife and son.

Explanations soon followed, and Jack was treated with the utmost cordiality by the man who had before judged him so harshly.

The Secret League was broken up and some of its members arrested, from whom the secret of the entrance into Lovell's house, and other matters detailed above were learned.

John Lovell, at the earnest request of Ned, left Boston forever, as soon as his business could be settled, and returned to the West where so many happy years had been spent.

Jack Sparrow, eager to forget the shame of having been the son of a criminal, though that was not his fault, went away with Ned, and in another state hid the secret which so saddened his life.

Ned and he are as firm friends as ever, and are now in business together, while John Lovell, now retired from active life, happy in the love of his noble wife, often thinks with gratitude of the service rendered to him by the true, faithful lady, in that time now long past, when he had been

DOOMED.

[THE END.]

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